
Editorial

Science, A Key AALAS Initiative

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Science has always been a major focus of AALAS. Since the inaugural meeting of the five laboratory animal scientists who formed what would become AALAS, science has been the driving force behind discussions on appropriate care for laboratory animals. Although AALAS has adopted other major programs such as certification of animal care technicians and managers, education, and public outreach, the advancement of laboratory animal science and comparative medicine remains the primary goal of the Association.

The list of discoveries that have benefited human health is substantial. Among these are the discovery of insulin, the discovery and development of antibiotics, the development of cardiac pacemakers, the development of myriad vaccines, the discovery of Rh factor, decoding of the immune system and so on. Animals also have benefited from many of these findings, i.e., diabetes in dogs, vaccines for a variety of infectious diseases, antibiotics, etc. At the same time, laboratory animal scientists were investigating methods to provide better care for the animals essential to these discoveries. Their work has provided better understanding of diseases that can disrupt research or endanger animal health, developed pathogen-free and germ free animals, and the housing modalities necessary to maintain them as well as other techniques for disease prevention. For example, pathogenetic and epidemiological studies of mycoplasmosis dramatically reduced the prevalence of infection with *Mycoplasma pulmonis* and related diseases. Further, work conducted at the University of Notre Dame in the 1950's and 1960's hastened the development of isolator technology, with critical applications for production of pathogen-free research animals. More currently, research on *Helicobacter* infections has significant potential for improving the quality of laboratory animals. These examples highlight the importance of research to laboratory animal science as we seek to develop better animal models, improve animal health and devise new methods of animal care and housing.

AALAS is an organization of diverse membership. Our ranks include outstanding scientists, animal facility managers, laboratory animal care technicians, and the companies which make the

products used to house and care for animals. Our diversity should be the foundation on which we pursue laboratory animal science and remain leaders in animal-based research. In this regard, we must strengthen our bridges to other scientific disciplines. This presents both great opportunity and the challenge for us to learn how to effectively tap these relationships toward expanded and novel collaborations. More bluntly, we must answer the question, "How can we be better players in the scientific world?"

As one of us (VHP) stated in the Presidential speech in October, "science is one of my major objectives for the year I am to be in office." In other words, to re-invigorate science within AALAS. This idea also was explored in a recent *Comparative Medicine* editorial (1). We have discussed opportunities AALAS might pursue to begin work on this goal. One current idea is to sponsor a symposium encompassing federal agencies that can fund research relevant to laboratory animal science (NIH, DHHS, USDA, Homeland Security) and scientists within and outside of AALAS, whose work is relevant to laboratory animal science. The hope is that a common dialogue would emerge, interests joined, and bridges built. Hopefully, the groundwork for long-lasting synergy between AALAS and the broader scientific community would be established. Other symposia might focus on targeted scientific topics such as mouse models, mouse genomics, emerging laboratory animal diseases, and management of laboratory animal diseases. We hope other scientific initiatives will be forthcoming from the Scientific Advisory Committee as they too tackle the issue of how to strengthen science in laboratory animal science. The hope is to make AALAS the priority destination for anyone, including scientists, who have an interest in animal research.

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Reference

1. Jacoby, R. O. 2004. Finale. *Comp. Med.* 54:615-616.

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